

VZCZCXRO3836  
OO RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH  
DE RUEHBK #2963/01 3241047  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 201047Z NOV 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9027  
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7715  
RUEHSV/AMEMBASSY SUVA 0505  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 7535  
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 0329  
RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM 0338  
RUEHOR/AMEMBASSY GABORONE 0214  
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 0067  
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 0521  
RHHMUNS/COMSOPAC HONOLULU HI  
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC  
RUEHC/DEPT OF INTERIOR WASHINGTON DC  
RHMFIUU/DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY WASHINGTON DC  
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC

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SIPDIS  
SENSITIVE

EAP FOR AWYCKOFF; OES FOR CDAWSON, HSUMMERS; USAID EGAT FOR JWILSON,  
MMELNYK; MTS/MLS FOR DESKOFFS; INTERIOR FOR USFWS; USDA FOR USFS

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [SENV](#) [EAID](#) [TH](#)  
SUBJECT: ASEAN WILDLIFE NETWORK SCORES WITH AFRICAN IVORY BUST

REF: Kathmandu 1002

¶1. (U) Summary: In an important step forward against wildlife trafficking, the Royal Thai Police arrested two ivory traffickers on November 16 in Bangkok. The arrests came after a year-long joint investigation involving U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Royal Thai Police and the USG-supported ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN WEN). While there has been a string of impressive seizures of ivory products, these are the first arrests of major traffickers in Thailand, a key transit country for wildlife trafficking. The ring involved importation of African elephant ivory into Thailand, then shipment on to the U.S. Through USG-supported law enforcement training events, ASEAN WEN has built a network of law enforcement officers and built capacity throughout the region. Post welcomes OES programming plans that increases cooperation between regional drug and wildlife trafficking programs, and seeks to link and South and Southeast Asian wildlife trafficking efforts. END SUMMARY.

THE BUST - IVORY FROM AFRICA TO THAILAND TO THE U.S.

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¶2. (SBU) ASEAN WEN has been behind a series of recent seizures involving cooperative law enforcement among Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. African Ivory trade (internationally banned since 1989) has increasingly involved SE Asia. In 2008, Thai Customs seized two tons of African elephant ivory, Philippines Customs seized 3.5 tons (from Tanzania) and Vietnam Customs seized over 8 tons. As with many illegal trafficking industries, seizures and low level arrests have historically proven easier than capturing the kingpins. This year, however, there were notable arrests in Vietnam, Indonesia and now in Thailand. On November 16, the Royal Thai police arrested Thai operators of a ring smuggling African tusks and carved ivory from Thailand to the U.S. The arrests attracted extensive print, television and web media coverage. Forensic testing of ivory purchases made from the suspects showed that the ivory was of African elephant origin. The investigation involved cooperation among the Royal Thai Police, Customs and the Attorney General, and on the U.S. side the Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Immigration and Customs Enforcement Customs and Border Protection. USAID supported the travel of a Royal Thai Police officer and an interpreter to the United States to interview witnesses with USFWS special agents. Law enforcement investigations into the U.S. connection are ongoing.

## WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING AND ASEAN WEN

13. (U) Wildlife trafficking is often described as the (even if distant) third greatest illegal trade after arms and drugs; the global wildlife market is estimated to be worth \$10 to 30 billion annually. Southeast Asia's high species biodiversity has made the region a prime source for trafficking wildlife -largely to China for medicinal purposes and to the U.S. for collectors. Some ASEAN nations are source countries, such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Malaysia; some are transit countries such as Thailand and Singapore. In addition to biodiversity loss, as traffickers target the most endangered species, trafficking brings invasive species into the U.S. (such as the plague of Burmese Pythons in the Everglades) and undermines law enforcement generally as criminal gangs organize across borders. After ASEAN nations agreed to launch ASEAN WEN, Thailand took the lead in 2006 by hosting ASEAN WEN headquarters with help from a State/OES grant. USAID Regional Development Mission Asia now supports the ASEAN WEN secretariat through the Freeland Foundation.

## POLICE NETWORKING AND U.S. SPECIAL AGENTS

14. (U) The Thai arrests were the culmination of unprecedented joint U.S./ASEAN WEN/Freeland and Thai collaboration. USAID-supported Freeland has conducted numerous training workshops for law enforcement and protected area officers over the past year, including a joint Thai/Laotian training course that included forest police observers from two Indian states. In January, ASEAN law enforcement officials joined a networking workshop at the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Bangkok. Former

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U.S. Special Agents working for Freeland trained ASEAN officers, with the help of INTERPOL officials. At this ILEA course, police officers shared intelligence on leads and developed communication protocols and other tools. This networking led to successful seizures throughout the year in a number of the countries. In addition, a parallel organization, the NGO Wildlife Enforcement Network (ENV), got started with an EAP/OES small environmental grant. NGO ENV publishes a newsletter to connect NGO conservation data and field knowledge of trafficking patterns to the police.

## THE NEXT LEVEL - GLOBAL WEN

15. (U) As an organization, ASEAN WEN is still developing and needs to migrate to a system less dependent on USG assistance. The WEN may nevertheless provide a useful model for other regions and for global networking. Post sees as useful a planned OES grant will to connect the Wildlife Enforcement Networks of South Asia (a major source for trafficking via SE Asia to China) and the Americas with ASEAN WEN to help to connect South and Southeast Asian law enforcement entities; there have been demonstrated trafficking patterns from South to Southeast Asia and to China. Freeland Foundation has already been successful in gaining the interest of Indian state enforcement officials to observe ASEAN WEN training. The Nepalese Environment Ministry has just agreed to host South Asia WEN and has asked Freeland to organize donor support. The Thai Environment Minister and ASEAN-WEN are now working with the World Bank's Global Tiger Initiative, and after the successful Kathmandu meeting (Reftel), Thailand will host a Ministerial on Tiger conservation and trafficking in January 2010.

16. (U) Comment: As the home to ILEA, the regional INPERPOL office, and a host of regional law enforcement attaches, Bangkok is uniquely positioned to be the locus for anti-trafficking efforts in this part of the world. In addition to providing support for ASEAN-WEN, the Embassy is working to enlist Thailand in the Coalition Against Wildlife Trafficking (CAWT), which works to galvanize global support to combat trafficking. Several EAP ESTH officers have been active in working with OES, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and USTR in outreach for the 2008 Lacey Act Amendments and to engage ASEAN nations to work with us in combating both plant and animal trafficking. The World Wildlife Fund is also active in supporting Thailand's national network with training and collaboration with the Royal Thai Police and Military. Other ASEAN members have national WEN in various stages of development with encouragement from NGOs

and DOS ESTHoffs at posts. Post views favorably an ongoing OES grant to UN Office of Drug Control to integrate ASEAN WEN successes with UNODC's Border Liaison Posts to help deter all transnational illegal trafficking.

#### POINTS OF CONTACT

18. (U) For press releases and background information on ASEAN WEN and RDMA's Wildlife programs, visit [www.asean-wen.org](http://www.asean-wen.org); [www.freeland.org](http://www.freeland.org); and [www.usaid.gov/rdma](http://www.usaid.gov/rdma). The NGO Wildlife network can be viewed at [www.env.org](http://www.env.org). Points of contact are Hal Howard, Regional ESTH Hub officer, [howardhh@state.gov](mailto:howardhh@state.gov) and Winston Bowman, Director of RDMA Environmental Office, [wbowman@usaid.gov](mailto:wbowman@usaid.gov).